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FREE TEACHING AND FREE LEARNING IN THEOLOGY.

THEOLOGICAL INFORMATION AND STUDY ESSENTIAL TO GENERAL CULTURE.

A

LECTURE

BY THE

Rev. C. B. Upton, B.A., Sc.

MEMORIAL HALL, MANCHESTER,

6th February, 1878.

The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

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FREE TEACHING AND FREE LEARNING IN THEOLOGY.

If religion is to be made better than a doubtful superstition—if theology is to hold her own—it is surely by reverently teaching the study of divine relations and human powers and aspirations, in the spirit of pure devotion to the pursuit of universal truth—the very spirit of God moving over the waters of our present chaos.

In fact, Theology must be studied and pursued and taught in the same way as other sciences are studied and pursued and taught, absolutely free from tests, from authority, from foregone conclusions, and therefore at once and for ever dissociated from the petty organisations of church and sects.

INAUGURAL LECTURE.

BY THE

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THEOLOGICAL INFORMATION AND STUDY ESSENTIAL TO GENERAL CULTURE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE institution of the courses of lectures to which this Address is a preliminary indicates that in this great centre of commercial life there are some at least who are impressed with the idea that the systematic study of theology is a profitable one, and one worthy to take its place side by side with the study of mathematics, chemistry, physiology, and the other grand branches of investigation which contribute so much to the elevation and enrichment of human life. I shall endeavour this evening to justify the belief and he expectation out of which these lectures have proceeded by contending for the position that not only is the study of theological truth always desirable, but that there are also special reasons in the present day why it should receive general and careful attention. I trust, indeed, that the time is not very far removed when the conviction which inspires those who have taken in hand the theological instruction which is to be given in this place will so spread and deepen in the minds of thoughtful men all over the country, that instead of, or rather, I should say, in addition to these non-academic lessons, the thorough study of theology shall be duly recognised in all our great educational institutions, so that every college shall have its classes where the theological phenomena of history will be carefully investigated by unpledged lovers of truth; the great religious faiths of the world thoughtfully and reverently depicted and compared; and man's faculty for moral and spiritual discernment studied with a zeal and earnestness in some way proportionate to the momentous nature of the revelations which we thereby receive.

We may be told, however, that there exist good and cogent reasons why theological studies should be excluded from institutions, which are intended to further the free and full discussion of every other department of thought. Let me, then, now ask your attention to these assumed insurmountable obstacles which are supposed to permanently bar the way to the realisation of this aspiration in which, I believe, many of us share; and we will then inquire whether these objections do not melt away in proportion as this question is more carefully considered and more thoroughly understood.

The two main objections urged against the course advocated in this address.

Those who oppose the introduction of theology into the general curriculum of study fall into two main classes:—1st, those who believe that theology is an unreal science dealing with exploded errors; and, 2ndly, those who maintain that the differences in theological opinion are so important and vital that it is not possible for any teacher of these subjects to give satisfaction to more than one particular section of the religious public. I will take these objections in their order.

THE FIRST OBJECTION:—

"God, or the Power behind Phænomena, quite unknowable."

The first class of objectors, accordingly, maintain that theology is a study based not on facts but on fancies, and that to establish classes for such investigations in University College, London, or in Owens College, Manchester, would be tantamount to the absurdity of appointing professors of alchemy, or astrology, or of any other of the misty and fantastic speculations fostered in mediæval darkness, and now happily dissipated by the sunlight of scientific knowledge. We may study, we are told, the series of events or phænomena as in orderly procession they advance, constituting, on the one hand, what we call nature, and, on the other, that stream of sensations, emotions, thoughts and volitions which make up our personal consciousness; but beyond or behind these we cannot go. Of the order of events we may acquire much useful knowledge, but of the invisible Cause, to which each event and the succession of events are due, we can know nothing; or at the most, all that we can know is that such an invisible energy exists. Over the attributes, over the character of that Self-subsistent Substance or Cause there is ever drawn, we are assured, a veil altogether impenetrable by human ken. At this veil of mystery philosophers and theologians may earnestly or inquisitively gaze, and may fancy that they detect there the lineaments of divine intelligence and love: but, 'tis self-deception: they see naught save the reflection of their own minds, and the God they worship is but the magnified image of themselves,—an optical illusion to which the mental vision is subject when it strives to penetrate behind the surface of sensible phænomena. Now, of course, if all we can say of the Supreme Being is that He exists, our

theological knowledge is summed up in two words, and the teachers and students of theology find their occupation gone, and must needs seek to gratify their love of truth in some less barren department of knowledge.

Reply to the above objection.

But, for my own part, I must earnestly protest against the assumption that human intelligence is thus wholly excluded from any satisfying acquaintance with that Causal Power of which nature and mind are the manifestations. I do not indeed pretend that our knowledge of the Eternal and Infinite One is of the same defined and exhaustive character, or is as readily transmissible from mind to mind, as is our knowledge of the finite objects and events of nature and of human life; but I do believe and maintain that it is an assurance most real, most influential, most essential to the well-being, the progress, and the happiness of mankind. Later on in this address I propose to call attention to the solid basis of this knowledge in man's moral and spiritual experience, but at present I wish rather to deal with this question in its relation to scientific knowledge merely, and to show that even from this sphere theological considerations and perceptions cannot be wholly excluded.

I.

The study of the external world inevitably suggests ideas and emotions in reference to the Substance or Cause of Nature.

In the first place, then, I maintain that it is not reasonable to hold, as Mr. Herbert Spencer and Professor Tyndall profess to do, that Nature and Humanity are the manifestations of an Invisible Power, and yet that the study of nature and of history can throw no light upon the character of that creative and sustaining energy, in whom all things, physical and mental, live and move and have their being. The Cause cannot but be accounted adequate for the production of the Effect; the Substance must contain within it adequate provision for all its modes of expression; and I think that very few men can observe with intelligent interest the phænomena of this grassy globe and of the starry heavens without the consciousness that they are contemplating the activity of Power towards which the sentiments of reverence and awe spontaneously go forth. That this reverential mood takes possession at times of the most pronounced teachers of Agnosticism their own admissions clearly indicate. It cannot be doubted, I think, that Professor Tyndall is often visited by sentiments of admiration and even adoration in the felt presence of that Cosmic energy of some of whose operations he is so gifted an interpreter. As he penetrates farther than his fellowmen into the arcana of his own special department of science; as he slowly unravels by virtue of his analysing intellect some little portion of that marvellous web of phænomena which the Eternal is ever weaving, well may he shrink back, as

he declares he does, from supposing that his present knowledge can represent the acme of intelligence now existent in the universe; and that there is no Being who comprehends more perfectly than our *savans* do those complexities of structure and function, which our most advanced science only very imperfectly understands, yet understands sufficiently to be assured there exists in nature a subtilty of adaptation, a wondrous delicacy of workmanship in comparison with which the greatest achievements of human ingenuity are rude and coarse productions. Professor Tyndall would, however, probably tell us that when in his higher moods he yields to the elevating sentiments which the contemplation of Nature's marvels awakens in his soul, he is then passing beyond the proper limits of science, and regaling his spirit in those realms of imagination and emotion, to which the poet and the religious man have legitimate access, but which must be carefully marked off from the sphere of knowledge. That the apprehension of the character of the Eternal One, which physical science by itself is competent to give, is far too vague, indefinite, and unverifiable to be called knowledge, I most readily and emphatically admit.

No wholly satisfying theological convictions apart from the concurrent exercise of man's faculties of moral and spiritual discernment.

The adequate perception of theological truth is a privilege accorded, not to the exclusive exercise of one of our faculties, but to the healthy, well-balanced and concurrent exercise of our intellectual, our moral, and our spiritual discernment. The main foundations of satisfying religious convictions lie no doubt in the moral and spiritual experiences enshrined in history and literature, and repeated with greater or less of intensity and vividness in the individual soul. If, however, as theologians believe, the Spirit which communes with and illumines our inner life be also the creative energy ever active around us in nature, it is to be expected that the external world which appeals to our senses shall, in its expression, bear some confirmatory testimony to the reality and character of that Divine authorship which religious belief assumes. This confirmatory testimony, which is all that theology has a right to expect from science, science does, I believe, afford. When the more gifted of our *savans* tell us that they are wont to resign themselves to the elevating emotions which the contemplation of nature is fitted to excite, we must remind them that all Emotions imply corresponding Ideas, more or less definite, and, therefore, every sentiment of reverence, trust, or affection towards the Unknowable (whether cherished by the scientist or by the poet) is in itself a tacit confession that to them the cosmic energy is not wholly unknowable, but is vaguely apprehended as marvellous Power, as surpassing Wisdom, or as all-embracing Love. I maintain, then, that in so far as these sentiments with regard to the spirit and the essence of the Cosmos are felt and cherished by scientific men (and that they are so felt and cherished to a large extent even among those who call themselves Agnostics, I feel convinced), we are justified in concluding that such men not only see the transient phænomena of nature, but faintly apprehend also the character of the Eternal

Cause, out of whose constant energising, nature arises. The glimpses which they thus gain are, it is true, far too vague and variable to bring clear conception and satisfying conviction to minds unillumined by theological culture and personal religious experience; but are amply sufficient to show how vain it is for the student of the external world to pretend to ignore theology, and to proclaim his utter and invincible ignorance of the character of that Power whose outer manifestations he is ever studying. In truth, the moment our *savans* pass beyond the mere discovery and cataloguing of the order of phenomena, and allow their higher reason and emotions to expatiate on their discoveries, they immediately become perforce incipient Theologians and bear testimony more or less distinct to the presence in nature of the same power and influence which illumines the genius of the poet and the artist, and inspires the heart of the hero and the saint.

The ideas of Substance, Cause, and Power are not phænomenal but theological conceptions, and so the savant is perforce an incipient theologian.

As far as I can see, it is as impossible, as it is undesirable, for the thoughtful students of science to escape from the necessity of importing theological ideas into their scientific conceptions. They cannot eliminate the notions of Substance, Cause and Force from their physical studies and from their theory of Evolution; and Substance, Cause and Force are philosophical and theological ideas, which derive all their life and their significance from our consciousness of volitional self-identity, and of causation. Nor do I think they can wholly eliminate from science the idea of adaptation, of intelligent purpose, or even of benevolent design.

Darwinism in no way removes the necessity of supposing that nature is due to intelligent activity.

But here some one may ask me if I am utterly ignorant of Darwinism, and have not yet learned that this supposed necessity of assigning the harmonies of nature to intelligent activity is for ever explained away and exploded. I am well aware that since Mr. Darwin announced his theory of natural and sexual selection—a theory which no doubt constitutes a most valuable contribution towards our insight into the method of nature—that many "advanced thinkers," as it is the fashion now-a-days to call some of the most reckless and superficial speculators upon the profoundest questions of psychology and theology, have never ceased to proclaim with infinite assurance that the old argument from Design, the process of ascending "through nature up to Nature's God," is now effectually disposed of, and that henceforth the fields of Natural Theology, in which the countless readers of Paley and the Bridgewater Treatises have gathered so much delightful and, as it seemed to them, nutritious fruit, must be abandoned for ever by all intelligent students. So much for these glib assertions; but what is the sober fact?

Since the publication of Darwin's views, Hartmann, the most popular living philosopher in Germany, whose work on "the Philosophy of the Unconscious" has in a very few years run through seven large editions, Hartmann, I say, after submitting the Darwinian theory to a most searching criticism, and fully admitting the operation within certain limits of the principles which Darwin expounds, yet emphatically urges that no possible explanation can be given of the development of the organic world, which does not bring in the direct action of an organising intelligence. And what renders this testimony the more important is that Hartmann does not write in the interests of positive theology but in favour of pessimistic views of life and destiny. He denies, indeed, that the Cosmical energy, to whose activity Evolution is due, is possessed of consciousness, but he maintains that Science and Psychology force upon us the certainty that it is Universal Will, and that it is in the highest degree intelligent. I cannot follow the celebrated German pessimist in his paradoxical assertion that there can be the highest intelligence apart from consciousness; but I do hold that in his philosophy we have noteworthy evidence that the most thorough acquaintance with the theories of Evolution may not only not extinguish but may actually intensify the recognition of the reign of intelligent purpose in the universe. And to turn to a philosopher of a very different stamp—the Principal of the free theological college in London. Everyone who is acquainted with Dr. Martineau and his writings is well aware of his great familiarity with the more important features of contemporary science; and those who have attended his recent lectures on the "Evidences and Truths of Religion" have had clear evidence of his thorough study of the views which Darwin and his followers have propounded. I have had the privilege of listening to these lectures, as I also had of listening to lectures from the same teacher on the same subject some twenty years ago, and I find that so far is it from being the case that in Dr. Martineau's opinion recent science has impaired the validity of the Design-Argument, that this argument now assumes in his philosophy a more prominent and influential position than before, and the treatment of it is much enriched by many observations drawn from the writings of those very *savans*, who are supposed by superficial thinkers to have given the death-blow to natural theology. Nor let it be supposed that it is theologians and philosophers alone who see that natural theology, though at present quiet, is by no means dead, that it is merely in a pause of transition, undergoing beneficial modifications in the light of the new facts with which the Darwinians and the Evolutionists have enriched our knowledge, and is destined ere long to re-appear with more than its former vitality, and to become a powerful factor among the educational agencies of the ensuing age. It is a significant circumstance that Professor Huxley has come to see that the essential spirit of Teleology is not vitally affected by theories of evolution, for that science can never show that "the primordial molecular arrangement, of which all the phaenomena of the universe are the consequences, was not intended to evolve these phenomena." Many scientific men go, however, much further than this, and I may remind you that one of the most eminent of our mathematicians and physicists, Sir William

Thomson, thus wisely spoke in his Address, as President of the British Association, in 1871:—"I feel profoundly convinced that the argument from design has been greatly too much lost sight of in recent zoological speculations. Reaction against the frivolities of teleology such as are to be found, not rarely, in the notes of the learned commentators on Paley's 'Natural Theology,' has, I believe, had a temporary effect of turning attention from the solid irrefragable argument so well put forward in that excellent old book. But overpowering proof of intelligence and benevolent design lies all around us; and if ever perplexities, whether metaphysical or scientific, turn us away from them for a time, they come back upon us with irresistible force, showing to us through nature the influence of a free will, and teaching us that all living beings depend upon one ever-acting Creator and Ruler." We may add to these remarks of Sir William Thomson, the consideration that if recent science in some of its aspects appears on a superficial view to militate against the Theistic idea, in other and most important directions it lends powerful reinforcement to the conclusions of natural theology. The recent speculations concerning the nature of matter—the vortex-atom theory of Sir W. Thomson, the conclusions of Sir John Herschel and Professor Clerk Maxwell that molecules present all the essential features of manufactured articles, the doctrine of "the dissipation of energy" involving a beginning and an end in time to our present cosmical life;—all these theorisings, which find favour among many of the leaders of science, postulate the existence of definite acts of new creation in the physical world. How far such doctrines will stand the test of further investigation is no doubt uncertain; but one thing, I believe, is not uncertain, and it is that whatever particular theories of the mode of action of the Eternal Being in reference to the phænomenal universe may in succession arise and disappear, the belief that nature has its source and support in the energising of an Invisible Power of surpassing wisdom will never permanently vanish from among the well-assured convictions of mankind.

Scientific and theological studies are needful to each other, and blend in all wise culture.

The whole history of thought proclaims that science and theology—the investigation of phænomenal effects on the one hand, and of the existence and character of the Eternal Cause on the other—have the strongest natural affinities and reciprocal relations, and can never be disassociated without serious injury to the educational interests of humanity.

We are at present suffering from the one-sided direction of the attention to the phænominal world exclusively.

I cannot but believe that our culture is now grievously suffering from its one-sided character; and were the reading and thinking portion of our countrymen trained, as they ought to be, in the rudiments of philosophical

and theological research, they would not, as they now too often do, fall a ready prey to any daring negative speculations concerning God, or the soul, or moral responsibility, which a Tyndall, a Huxley, or a Clifford may choose to interweave with their physical or physiological teachings.

I have dwelt at, perhaps, disproportionate length on this aspect of my subject, but I feel it very important to make the position quite clear that scientific studies inevitably carry with them theological ideas; that the very men who profess to ignore these ideas indirectly bear testimony to their irrepressible influence. The question of moment in the present day is not whether we shall have science without theology, for that is impossible—the very Agnosticism of our scientists is, as I have said, an incipient and crude theology,—but it is whether we shall have science studied in conjunction with thorough theological training and reflection, or in conjunction with such jejune and negative ideas concerning the nature of the Eternal One as may be expected when *savans* turn amateur philosophers and theologians, and in sensational lectures to unprepared audiences make easy havoc with the beliefs and hopes that have for ages been the bread of life to mankind. As I before noticed, theology has been compared with alchemy and astrology, and no doubt much that passes under the name of theology deserves to be so characterised; but we must bear in mind that alchemy and astrology, amid all their errors and delusions, contained essential truths, and out of them arose the honoured sciences of chemistry and astronomy. Are there not around us cheerful signs that theology is likewise passing into a higher stage, dropping its superstitions and its bigotry, and resting more and more upon the authentic facts of moral and spiritual experience, and thus qualifying itself for the more effectual performance of its lofty function as the interpreter of the Divine Life in nature and in the soul—just as the several natural sciences are the interpreters of its varied modes of outward expression?

II.

The study of the influence of religious faith in history and biography gives a clearer and fuller insight than science can give into the character of the Supreme Being, and His sympathetic response to the needs and aspirations of His rational creatures.

I have tried to show that science cannot be understood and expounded without theological assumptions expressed or implied, and therefore it is fitting that in every great seat of learning, where the sciences are taught, theology also should receive parallel attention. Now what I have said with regard to the study of nature, applies with far more obvious pertinence to the study of History. If I had no other arguments to urge in favour of the more general culture of theology, I should consider it sufficient to point out that, apart from it, history becomes an inexplicable enigma, and no adequate account can be given of those critical turning-points which determine the destinies of men and nations. What influence is so irresistible and at the

same time so apparently unaccountable as the origin and growth of religious faith, and what influence, I may add, has played a more important part in modifying the character and enriching the civilisation of mankind? Scientific knowledge has, no doubt, been a powerful instrument for good; but it can hardly be questioned that the effect of religious belief upon the personal, the social, and the political life has been incalculably more important. Sometimes, indeed, this faith, when it has been associated with perverted intellectual and moral culture, has proved a terrible and most oppressive tyrant; but, whether well or ill-directed, the religious sentiment if genuine, is never feeble or inoperative.

Some analogy between the direct action of the Spirit of God in the history of mankind, and the action of igneous energy in the geological history of the globe.

If we try to picture to ourselves what would have been the condition of society if the influence of such men as Moses, Socrates, Sakya-Muni, Paul and Jesus, and other divinely-inspired souls in more recent times, had been struck out of history, we seem to be endeavouring to solve a problem something like that which a geologist would have to solve, if he were asked to explain what would have become of the physical world if it had been left merely to the levelling influence of water, and had never been upheaved into mountain chains and groups by the mighty igneous energy from within. As the geologist would tell us that such uninterrupted aqueous action would at length have dragged all elevations down to a monotonous level, and covered the earth with a uniform and cheerless ocean-plain, so I think the historian of mankind would have to admit that were the elevating influences of religious faith and hope withdrawn, society would gradually deteriorate by reason of the deadening effect of selfishness and custom, till at length all that is specially distinctive of human nature would die out, and our race gravitate down to the dull level of a merely animal existence. And not only has religious faith been very influential, as it seems to me, in enabling mankind to attain to their present intellectual and moral altitude, and in counteracting the constant tendency to sink back to lower levels of experience, but this upheaving spiritual energy, while it affects all men more or less, incarnates itself at times with especial purity and might in some selected soul, and through him acts mightily upon society. It is these burning principles of faith and love, becoming so fervid at times as to melt and merge the human in the Divine, which give to the choicer epochs of history, and to special periods in the lives of individuals, their exceptionally grand or picturesque character. Over such scenes in history and biography the soul delights to ponder: they tell of influences not of earth; they seem to bring us into the nearer presence of the Eternal. Most delightful and soul-refreshing is an excursion to our Cambrian or Cumbrian hills, with their embosomed lakes mirroring such varied loveliness; their noble mountain tops, whereon we breathe a more invigorating air and gain more glorious ideas of this beautiful globe on which we dwell. Such visits to the sweet and sublime retreats of nature are indeed precious;

but a still more precious experience is it to study, in the past and in the present, the grand Alpine heights, the ineffable charms of human character, manifesting as they do the marvellous influence of the Holy Spirit in raising some self-forgetful soul above the mean and commonplace into the heroic, the saintly, the Divine.

To study such characters earnestly and lovingly; to pass into genuine discipleship to them, is, I conceive, one of the chief features in the true method of theological study. There can be no doubt that we gather up in our hereditary complexion, and in the various influences which make up our education the purifying and fertilising effects of these inspired lives which constitute the grand landmarks in the religious history of our section of the human race. This, however, is not the only benefit which these diviner souls confer on humanity. In our private reading, or in lectures such as these which are about to be delivered in this hall, we may penetrate more deeply into the life and character of the beloved sons of the Eternal, and as we are for a season raised by contact with their more spiritual natures to grander experiences and a loftier point of view, we can hardly fail to feel the kindling of faith and love at the heart of our own being, assuring us that we also are visited by the Holy Spirit, we also may be uplifted and blessed by the self-same Divine influence which gives to the lives of those we reverence such saintly purity, such engaging sweetness, such marvellous power to illumine, to strengthen, and to bless. For a brief season at least, we become at one with them as they are at one with God. As we come down refreshed and comforted from these occasional visits to the mountain heights of prophetic experience, we enter into our daily business with a wiser mind and a more loving heart; our hidden life with God becomes more real; to doubt of His presence, His wise guidance, and His unfathomable love becomes for the time impossible; and we feel that it is true wisdom and true happiness to die to self and live in this Eternal Life within.

I fear that what I have just said will sound mystical and perhaps fanciful to some who are here present, as it certainly would do to those who are admiring followers of our most popular *savans* and philosophers. But for the purpose which I have now in view, it is not necessary that you should follow me in my explanation of the mighty influence which religion and its prophets have exerted upon society and history. It is only necessary that you should recognise the reality and importance of this influence; and having done so, I think you will admit that you are face to face with facts of the most practical character, which demand recognition and investigation; with facts that are organically connected at many vital points with our own personal experience and with the entire development of the life of mankind. The most decided Positivist will not deny that such remarkable phænomena call for careful attention and study. He may believe that he can succeed in showing that the hero, the prophet, and the saint, not only take the particular form of their ideas from ancestral and educational influences, but that all that constitutes their genius, their nobleness, and their power, likewise admits of such explanation, so that when the antecedent phænomena are understood there is no special spiritual element left to be accounted for. I

cannot admit that such attempts to give an exhaustive explanation of the noblest and divinest men, without appealing to any fresh inspiration from the Eternal, have so far been at all successful. But be this as it may, no one can doubt that such men and their influence are subjects of the nearest and deepest interest; and therefore the religious history of the world and, *par excellence*, the religious history of the nation in which spiritual phænomena of the most marked kind are conspicuously manifested, should be treated as an important feature in our educational discipline, and should be regarded as certainly not less desirable and imperative than is the study of the military and the constitutional history of the several nations of the world. Nor, indeed, is it possible to separate religious or ecclesiastical history from secular history without serious detriment to the successful treatment of the latter, for not only is the course of political events often quite controlled by unlooked-for currents of religious enthusiasm, but all that is most precious and durable in the social life, in the art and in the literature of a nation, is more or less organically connected with its moral ideal and the character of its religious faith. Surely, then, there is good reason why the origin and the history of the chief religions of the world, and their comparative influence on the personal and the national life should receive careful consideration from all who aspire to that complete and well-balanced culture which is the characteristic of the truly wise man, as distinguished from the sectarian and one-sided partisan in the great commonwealth of truth.

If the considerations I have now brought before you are sound, it follows that the first objection, to which I alluded, is not tenable, and that theology is no merely imaginary science, whose subject-matter exists only in the realms of fancy. Theology has for its subject-matter that creative and sustaining energy which we have seen science cannot ignore, and about whose nature no student of the external world can avoid theorising with more or less of intelligent insight. We have seen, too, that there are good reasons for concluding that this cosmical energy is not only power of inconceivable vastness, but that it is power directed by surpassing wisdom, and that, therefore, the study of Natural Theology has valid claims to take its place as an important branch of culture. But, while the interpretation of nature affords some glimpse of the character of its Eternal Cause, it is in the study of human nature and human history that we meet with far more suggestive indications of the essential nature of the Supreme, and of the constant and living relations in which He stands to the spirit of man. Science must assume a Divine Presence and Activity behind phænomena, and can hardly fail to recognise some trace of Divine Wisdom; but it is in the distinctive character and immeasurable influence of religion on human life that we find the most important *data* for the establishment of the grand fundamental principles of theology. For in the religious history of nations and of individuals we appear to see not only the uniform energising of the Eternal, but fresh and special acts of new creation which force upon us the conclusion that this energy, whose character we are investigating, is a principle of love and inspiration, acting constantly

and sympathetically in accordance with the needs and aspirations of His creatures.

III.

Personal religious experience, combined with some philosophic insight, required for the adequate interpretation of religious phænomena.

But the religious phænomena of history, though as intensely interesting to the wise student, as they are influential in the development of the human race, cannot be understood, save in a most superficial way, unless we have the adequate clue to their deep meaning in a rich religious experience interpreted to us by clear philosophic insight. Hence theology, or religious philosophy, finds its special sphere of exercise in the study of the rational intuitions and of the moral and religious experience of the spirit of man.

Science, a rationale of our sensational—Theology, of our rational, moral, and spiritual experience. Both imply the action of a Power other than human.

Just as the various physical sciences are a *rationale* of man's sensational experience, so is theology a *rationale* of the phenomena of man's higher nature: and as the former inevitably involves the conviction of an Invisible Power operating upon us from without, so, in a still more striking mode, does the latter imply and reveal a Power acting directly upon our inner life. The Power manifesting itself without us, and the Power revealing itself within us are, we are constrained to believe, but the different phases of the activity of one and the same Eternal Self-subsistent Being, and thus Science and Theology both lead us to God, but it is to the latter rather than to the former that we must mainly look for the clearest assurance of His presence, and for the most distinct and satisfying apprehension of His character.

Theology is, accordingly, like the physical sciences, based on experience and experiment.

Hence, I take it, theology is essentially as much a science based on observation and experiment as is geology, or chemistry; and whoever seeks to penetrate to its deep and consoling truths without cherishing his own moral and religious life is taking as foolish and as futile a course, as a student of natural science would take, if he confined his studies to books, and did not cultivate a first-hand acquaintance with nature, and personally interrogate her by well-directed observations and experiments.

I maintain, then, that religious philosophy is based upon experience and experiment; that in the sense of Duty; in the felt power of Prayer; in the various religious emotions and their satisfactions; in the feelings of alienation from and reconciliation with God; in the assurance realised more or less by

all men, but with especial intensity by the saintliest minds, that God stands to them in a more intimate, a more vital, a more truly sympathetic relation than the nearest friends can possibly stand to one another:—I say, in all these facts of the moral and spiritual consciousness, we have the experiential *data* out of which theology elicits a more or less adequate interpretation of the living relations in which the Eternal One stands to the spirit of man.

THE SECOND OBJECTION:—

"That there is no unanimity in reference to theological truth."

But when I make this claim, I may well be met with the second objection to which I alluded at the opening of this lecture. I may very properly be asked how it comes to pass, if theology be a valid study, based on the normal religious experience of mankind, that it is impossible to appoint teachers of theology in our modern undenominational Colleges, if for no other reason, at least for this, that there is no general unanimity of opinion as to what is to be considered theological truth.

A serious practical difficulty, but one which arises out of erroneous views of the nature and criterion of theological truth.

Now, I am only too well aware that in the present state of public opinion in respect to the essentials of theology and religion, there is a difficulty, and I fear an insuperable difficulty, to the immediate adoption of the course I am advocating. Public opinion will have to unlearn many utterly erroneous notions, and to pass through a long educational discipline ere this obstacle will be removed, and theology be enabled to take its legitimate position in the general educational scheme. The fundamental error out of which this obstacle proceeds is a deeply-rooted one, and will take many years to fully eradicate. That it will be finally eradicated I feel no doubt; nay, as I shall presently try to show, it is even now receiving some earnest and powerful tugs, which have already loosened its hold on the public mind and heart, and must in course of time uproot it thoroughly. As I before suggested, it is probable that one of the reasons why the popular theology is at present disqualified for admission into general culture is that it is still in what we may call the pre-scientific stage, and is related to rational and healthy theology as alchemy is related to chemistry. But this is not all.

Peculiar character of religious as distinguished from sensational experience.

The main gist of the difficulty lies, I think, in the special character of religious experience, as compared with that sensational experience out of which the physical sciences arise. The sensational experience which scientific study requires for its prosecution and verification is always accessible. It is, it is true, an experience of a far lower order than spiritual experience, but it

has the advantage over the latter of being within the reach of all men, and of the same man in all his moods. Now our spiritual relation to the Supreme Being is not of this character. It is the function of our pulpits to kindle and sustain this spiritual life, and to make it the dominant element in our nature, and the religious man is never without some sense of living contact with God. But the spiritual insight of different men varies greatly; nor does the same man at all seasons of his life discern divine truth with the same breadth and vividness. In all his moods Professor Tyndall can investigate the properties of light and sound; it is only in his higher moods that he has suggestive gleams of religious insight.

Spiritual experience is immensely enriched, intensified, and purified by sympathetic contact with diviner souls.

One of the principal laws which govern spiritual experience is, that it acquires a quite fresh and exceeding precious vividness and depth when we have intercourse with, or read the thoughts and deeds of those diviner spirits, who have enjoyed in measure far deeper and fuller than ours the riches of this inner communion with God.

Science knows nothing of Persons: in Religion the personal relation is most important and vital.

Hence it is that while science is impersonal, religion is intensely personal. It is not essential to the student of physical science to know anything about the personal life of the discoverers of great scientific truths; all that he wants is to know the nature of the discovery; the sensational experience that explains and verifies it, he has already at hand. Not so with the theologian. He not only requires to know what the prophet teaches, but it is essential that he should be able to share, in some degree at least, the prophet's religious consciousness, otherwise the utterance is to him of little worth—it is but the dead body of doctrine without the living spirit. Hence the life, the personal character, the emotional state which prompts the utterance, the vivid picture of the intercourse with God enjoyed by spiritual seers, is, or should be, with the student of religion a quite essential matter. A dry, philosophical statement of the articles of the theological belief of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus would be of little value; it is because the teachings of those men are instinct with moral and religious life, and so kindle our emotional nature—our God-consciousness -and thus gift us with some share of their own spiritual experience and discernment, that they are of such immeasurable worth. Therefore it comes to pass that the life of a divine man, and the words which body forth his felt relations with the Eternal, can never become obsolete to the theologian. The student of phænomenal knowledge, on the other hand, is not vitally interested in the life and teachings of earlier

savans, whose true views have been taken up into and so have been superseded by the most recent scientific treatises.

It is natural and fitting that prophetic teachers should be regarded as authorities

Theology has accordingly a most living interest in the past as well as in the present, and a most intimate and vital connection with the lives and words of saintly men and prophetic teachers through all the ages. The natural and inevitable consequence of this is that divine persons become *authorities* in theology. Now, this principle of authority, or the disposition to trust in theological matters those whom we instinctively feel to enjoy a purer and deeper spiritual experience than we do, properly understood, is a most sound and indispensable one; but the application of it in the popular theology is a perverse and exceedingly mischievous one.

All prophetic minds see essentially the same spiritual truth; but in different degrees of fulness, and their utterances are more or less alloyed by accidents of culture.

Every earnest and unbiassed student of the world's greatest religious teachers will, I think, bear me out in the assertion that when you study their character and writings, and penetrate to the real spirit of their revelations, you will find that, much as they appear to differ in the letter of their teachings, no sooner do you strip off from their doctrines the peculiarities that are due to the idiosyncracy of the prophet and to the intellectual influences of the age in which he lived, than you discover a substantial agreement in all the spiritual facts to which their experience bears positive testimony. Different religious teachers will no doubt differ much in the clearness and scope of their spiritual insight; but if we look not to their denials and negations (which only indicate what they did *not* see), but to their positive asseverations and announcements (which reveal the nature of that which they did see), we shall find, I believe, that the moral and spiritual experience on which theology is based is substantially identical in all men, who have reached to the same purity and depth of communion with God.

Abuse of the principle of authority in the popular theology owing to the imperfect recognition of the fact that each man possesses some faculty of Spiritual Discernment.

Unfortunately, however, the popular mind does not recognise this truth. It makes persons, books, and churches into authorities, but does not accept the principle which is the natural safeguard against the abuse of this principle of autho-

rity—*i.e.*, it does not admit the possession of Spiritual Discernment by the soul of man. This principle alone can affix the proper limits to the range of personal authority in matters of religion; this alone can enable us to distinguish between the real revelation of which the prophet is the messenger, and the accidental accretions of personal judgment and contemporary culture; this alone can enable us to tell whether the prophet says these things of himself, or whether the words are the words of the Father within him. When this natural test is allowed and applied, and men see that spiritual experience or the life of man in God is, in its essential features, quite as real and unchangeable as is our sensational experience of the external world—then, and not till then, will the difficulty vanish which excludes theology from its natural place in our curriculum of study.

Signs that the best theologians in the so-called orthodox Churches are beginning to test theological truth by spiritual discernment—i.e, *by an appeal to the spirit of God within them.*

That this principle of spiritual discernment is slowly being admitted, the present widespread rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment conclusively shows; for in this rejection is involved the admission that no doctrines can be accepted on authority that contravene the moral sense, and are unauthorised by man's spiritual experience. What says Canon Farrar in his admirable and celebrated sermons in Westminster Abbey?—"I fling from me with abhorrence such a creed as that. Let every Pharisee gnash his teeth if he will; let every dogmatist anathematise; but that I cannot and do not believe. Scripture will not let me; my conscience, my reason, my faith in Christ, the voice of the Spirit within my soul, will not let me; God will not let me.' In this tacit admission that "the Spirit of God within the soul" is the true court of appeal in matters of theological doctrine Canon Farrar has virtually undermined the foundation on which the whole fabric of error and uncharitableness, in which theology has so long been imprisoned, really rests; and there can be little doubt that this eloquent and courageous preacher speaks as the representative voice of an influential and growing minority in all the so-called orthodox churches.

Anticipations of the future of theological study.

There is good reason, then, to believe that if not quite in our time, at all events before many generations shall have passed away, correct views on theology will prevail; and then, as I believe, there will not only be no wish to exclude theology from the halls of culture; but, on the contrary, there will be an eager desire to give it a prominent and honoured place. Then Bibliolatry will vanish, but the rational appreciation and love of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures will be vastly deepened, and the earnest and reverent study of them, freed from dogmatic thraldom, will become a privilege and a delight. No

longer shall we have, as in the theological section of the present local examinations of Oxford and Cambridge, the students and examiners in Jewish and Christian history and literature, committing year by year no less an absurdity than would be committed by a student of Greek or Roman history, if he ignored the works of Thirlwall and Grote, of Niebuhr and Mommsen, and set himself to learn by heart the undigested mass of fact and fable to be found in Livy and Herodotus. Then, too, a blessed change will come over our theological literature. No longer will the main interest centre in sectarian treatises, in apologies for particular forms of doctrine; but those books will come to the front which have long been dear to the deep heart of humanity, and so have ever been rescued from the ravages of time—such books, I mean, as are the expression and the fruit of a rich and deep religious life, books of the stamp of the "De imitatione Christi" in the olden time, and which are represented by such writings as those of the two Newmans, of Robertson of Brighton, of Channing, Thom, and Martineau in our present literature. But I must not dwell prematurely on this engaging picture of the golden age in store for theology. Much strenuous but noble work has to be done ere this happy result is realised; and I can only in conclusion congratulate the teachers and the students of these classes that they are among the earliest pioneers of a really good movement, which bids fair to confer incalculable blessings on mankind.

COURSES FOR 1877-78.

I. OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY AND LITERATURE.—The Prophecy of the Second Isaiah (Is. xl.-lxvi.) in connection with the History of the Religion of Israel from the Reformation of Josiah.—Rev. T. E. POYNTING, Wednesdays, at 3 p.m.

II. NEW TESTAMENT LITERATURE AND THEOLOGY.—The Book of Revelation, with reference to Daniel, and the other (extra canonical) Apocalyptic Literature.—Rev. C. T. POYNTING, Wednesday, at 3 p.m.

III. HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN ITS MORE CRITICAL PERIODS.—Survey of the Political, Moral, and Religious Condition of the Roman Empire in the First Century.—Rev. S. A. STEINTHAL, Tuesdays, at 7 30 p.m.

IV. RATIONAL GROUNDS AND TRUTHS OF MORALS AND RELIGION.—The Basis of Morals and Sources of Practical Religion.—Rev. JAS. BLACK, Wednesdays, 4 p.m.

These Lectures will be delivered at the Memorial Hall, Manchester, on Wednesdays, at the hours named, commencing on Wednesday, the 13th February. Each Course will include about Twelve Lectures, and also Conversational Instruction. Fee for each course, 2s. 6d.—Syllabus of each course may be had from the Lecturers, or the Secretary, or from Mr. Jones, at the Hall.

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